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DEPT. FOR DS/IP/AF, AF A/S FRAZER, DS/DSS/ITA, AF/SPG, AF/EX

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC SU

SUBJECT: GOVERNOR OF KHARTOUM MAINTAINS THAT EMBASSY STREET
WILL BE RE-OPENED

REF: A. KHARTOUM 857

¶B. KHARTOUM 858
¶C. KHARTOUM 861

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 11, Charge d'Affaires (CDA) Fernandez met the Governor of Khartoum State, Dr. Abdulhalim al Mutaafi, to discuss the Governor's May 30 declaration that the street directly in front of the U.S. Embassy will be reopened to vehicular traffic. In the meeting, al Mutaafi directly tied the proposed opening of Ali Abdul Latif street to U.S. sanctions. Al Mutaafi also claimed that he was not personally responsible for his statements, implying that he was ordered by his superiors to make this decision. Al Mutaafi stated that he would prefer Sudanese security to control the street, and hinted that his desired configuration would include faster vehicle screening times, different screenings for cars and trucks, and two way traffic. Post convened an Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting to discuss the issue and will report septel. END SUMMARY.

MORE THAN A STREET

¶2. (C) After welcoming CDA Fernandez to Khartoum, Al Mutaafi, accompanied by MFA Directors for Protocol and American Affairs, stated that the tightened U.S. sanctions will affect the Sudanese economy. He asserted that the selection of the companies was very good, acknowledging that in particular the sugar industry will be hit hard. He then alleged that this proposed street opening is a symbolic action, stating, "It is not just a street, it is more than a street. The problem is with Darfur."

¶3. (C) Al Mutaafi did not accept personal responsibility for his May 30 statements, saying that he was asked to sign a document containing the provocative statements. He did not give further details regarding who instructed him to do so. The Director of the Department of American Affairs, Amb. Abd Elbasi Badawi al Sanosi, stated that the governor is being attacked in the press and is under pressure to do something. Al Mutaafi appeared to recognize this dilemma, stating "The people want a bulldozer, we want a compromise." Al Mutaafi also added that just as activist groups pressured the U.S. government to tighten sanctions on Sudan, the Sudanese people forced the government of Sudan to respond. He also acknowledged that the street in front of the embassy is one of the few ways that the government of Sudan can respond to the tightened U.S. sanctions, noting that "We can't impose sanctions on you."

PROPOSED CHANGES - SYMBOLIC OR SUBSTANTIVE?

¶ 14. (C) Al Mutaafi stated that control of the street will be handed over to Sudanese security. CDA Fernandez responded that all the AmEmbassy employees working at the checkpoints are Sudanese citizens and furthermore police employed by the Government of Sudan are posted around the embassy. He reminded the Sudanese of our 2003 agreement and their responsibility to protect diplomatic property and personnel.

¶ 15. (C) Although exact details were not discussed, al Mutaafi implied that his desired configuration for the road would possibly include faster vehicle screening times, different screenings for cars and trucks, and two way traffic. He added that what was most important was the "symbolism" of this act and not actually putting the embassy at risk.

¶ 16. (C) Regarding the timeframe for further action, al Mutaafi stated that this meeting was already delayed by a week, in order to give the recently arrived CDA a little time upon his arrival. While not giving a specific timeframe, al Mutaafi alluded that the next few months would likely determine this issue. DCM Powers stated that the construction of the security barriers on Ali Abdul Latif took several months to put in place, and urged all participants to move slowly and with caution. CDA Fernandez reminded Al Mutaafi that we need further details about any proposal put forth. The CDA and Al Mutaafi agreed that representatives of the National Intelligence Security Services (NISS) and embassy meet to discuss the technical details of potential security plans. A NISS official was present for the discussion.

¶ 17. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting, CDA Fernandez reiterated that this is very alarming, reminding the governor of the attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and of the continuous possibility that demonstrations against embassies could turn violent. He argued that this was not in the best interest of Sudan at this time, saying that these developments will only lead to further misunderstanding and frustration. He stated, we are deeply concerned and we see this as a qualitative negative change in our security.

¶ 18. (C) COMMENT. Al Mutaafi appears to be under pressure from multiple directions. He stated that he was directed by his superiors in the Sudanese government to make this proclamation. Meanwhile, some of the Sudanese press, student groups, and segments of the general populace have called for action. Al Mutaafi appears to want to save face by taking control of security and making at least some physical change to the road in front of the embassy. For al Mutaafi and others in the government of Sudan, the opening of Ali Abdel Latif street constitutes one of the few ways that Sudan can respond to the U.S. sanctions. Although not explicitly stated, both Al Mutaafi and Director General of Protocol, Ali Yousef, hinted that further punitive responses to further American measures may include delaying the release of containers for the new embassy compound. END COMMENT.
FERNANDEZ